

emerging from two decades of turmoil that destroyed everything we managed to build in a century and a half of independence. The costs of our conflict run wide and deep, manifested in varied ways: mismanagement, corruption, bad governance, massive looting of public treasury and assets. Unlike the tsunami in Asia and Katrina here in your own country, where the destruction and human casualty were caused by nature, we participated in or stood silently by in our own self-destruction. Our country agonized with your citizens and the victims and families of these natural tragedies and our country also agonized with itself over the effects of a senseless civil war.

In the campaign months, I traveled to every corner of our country. I trudged through mud in high boots, where roads did not exist or had deteriorated past repair. I surveyed ruined hospitals and collapsed clinics. I held meetings by candlelight, because there is no electricity anywhere, including the capital, except from private generators. I was forced to drink water from creeks and unsanitized wells, all of which made me vulnerable to the diseases from which so many of my people die daily.

I came face to face with the human devastation of war, which killed a quarter of a million of our 3 million people and displaced most of the rest. Hundreds of thousands escaped across borders. More, who could not, fled into the bush, constantly running from one militia or another, often surviving by eating rodents and wild plants that made them sick and even killed them.

Our precious children died of malaria, parasites and malnourishments. Our boys, full of potential, were forced to be child soldiers, to kill or be killed. Our girls, capable of being anything they could imagine, were made into sex slaves, gang-raped by men with guns, made mothers while they still were children themselves.

But listening to the hopes and dreams of our people, I recall the words of a Mozambican poet who said, "Our dream has the size of freedom." My people, like your people, believe deeply in freedom; and in their dreams, they reach for the heavens.

I represent those dreams. I represent their hope and their aspirations. I ran for President because I am determined to see good governance in Liberia in my lifetime. But I also ran because I am the mother of four, and I wanted to see our children smile and play again.

Already, I am seeing those smiles. For even after everything they have endured, the people of Liberia have faith in new beginnings. They are counting on me and my administration to create the conditions that will guarantee the realization of their dreams. We must not betray their trust. All the children I meet, when I ask what they want most, say, "I want to learn." "I want to go to school." "I want an education." We must not betray their trust.

Young adults, who have been called our lost generation, do not consider themselves lost. They, too, aspire to learn and to serve their families and their communities. We must not betray their trust.

Women, my strong constituency, tell me that they want the same chances that men have. They want to be literate. They want their work recognized. They want protection against rape. They want clean water that won't sicken and kill their children. We must not betray their trust.

Former soldiers tell me they are tired of war. They do not want to have to fight or run again. They want training. They want jobs. If they carry guns, they want to do so in defense of peace and security, not war and pillage. We must not betray their trust.

Entrepreneurs who have returned from abroad with all their resources, risking everything to invest in their country's future, tell me they want a fair and transparent regulatory environment. They want honesty and accountability from their government. We must not betray their trust.

Farming families who fled the fighting for shelter in neighboring countries or found themselves displaced from their communities want a fresh start. They want to return home. They want seeds. They want farm implements. They want roads to get their goods to market. We must not betray their trust.

I have many promises to keep. As I won elections through a free and peaceful process, I must preserve freedom and keep the peace. As I campaigned against corruption, I must lead a government that curbs it. As I was elected with the massive vote of women, I must assure that their needs are met.

We are not oblivious to the enormity of the challenges we face. Few countries have been as decimated as ours. In the chaos of war, our HIV rates have quadrupled. Our children are still dying of curable diseases, tuberculosis, dysentery, measles, and malaria. Schools lack books, equipment, teachers, and buildings. The telecommunications age has passed us by. We have a \$3.5 billion external debt, lent in large measure to some of my predecessors who were known to be irresponsible, unaccountable, unrepresentative, and corrupt. The reality that we have lost our international creditworthiness bars us from further loans, although now we would use them wisely.

Our abundant natural resources have been diverted by criminal conspiracies for private gain. International sanctions, imposed for the best of reasons, still prevent us from exporting our raw materials. Roads have disappeared and bridges have been bombed or washed away. We know that trouble could once again breed outside our borders. The physical and spiritual scars of war are deep indeed.

So with everything to be done, what must we do first? We must do everything we can to consolidate the peace

that so much was paid to secure, and we must work to heal the wounds of war. We must create an emergency public works program to put the whole nation to work and give families an income through the rebuilding of critical infrastructure, strengthening security and attracting investment. We must rehabilitate the core of an electricity grid to high-priority areas and institutions and visibly demonstrate to the people that government can provide necessary services.

We must bring home more of our refugees and resettle the displaced. We must give them the tools to start anew, and encourage more of our skilled expatriates, who have the knowledge and the experience to build our economy, to return home. For those unable to come home, we must appeal to you to grant them continuing protective status, and residency where appropriate, to put them in a condition to contribute to their country's reform and development.

We must complete the demobilization of former combatants and restructure our army, police and security services. We must create legal systems that preserve the rule of law, applied to all without fear or favor.

We must revive educational facilities, including our few universities. We must provide essential agricultural extension services to help us feed ourselves again, developing the science and technology skills to ensure that we prosper in a modern global economy. We must create an efficient and transparent tax system to ensure the flow of government revenues and create a hospitable investment climate.

With few resources beyond the will of my people, I want you to know, we have made a strong beginning. During my first few weeks in office, by curbing corruption we have increased government revenue by 21 percent. We have canceled noncompliant forestry concessions and fraudulent contracts; required senior government appointees to declare financial assets; implemented cash management practices to ensure fiscal discipline and sharpen efficiency; met the basic requirements for eligibility under the U.S. general system of preferences and initial Ex-Im Bank support; restored good relationships with bilateral and multilateral partners; commenced the process leading to an IMF-supported staff monitoring program; accelerated implementation of the Governance Economic Management Plan, the GMAP; and launched a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate the abuses of war.

But while we seek national unity and reconciliation, we must not sacrifice justice. I respect the lifesaving role that our West African neighbors, particularly Nigeria, played at no small cost to them in accepting to host Mr. Charles Taylor. Liberians are deeply grateful. But I say here, as I have said before, Liberia has little option but to see that justice is done in accordance with the requirements of the United